

SELECTED READINGS IN THE HISTORY OF THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Introduction to the Selected Readings List

Readers in the history of Reclamation will quickly learn that writers differ markedly on how to interpret its past. Historical accounts about the Bureau of Reclamation often, more so than for other Department of the Interior bureaus, have been colored sharply by their time and by the personal views of the author. Writers over time have perceived Reclamation as both hero and villain. Historical interpretation of Reclamation is a very complex task because a constantly evolving body of legislation, decisions, policies, and politics has combined with the changing economic health of the nation to shape Reclamation over nearly a century.

This “Selected Reading List” is an attempt to provide a starting point for readers interested in the history of Reclamation or the evolution of Western water policy and development. Various, occasionally extreme, points of view are represented in this list. Before arriving at final conclusions about the difficult public policy issues raised by Reclamation’s historic role in Western water development and management, the careful researcher will read fairly extensively. Charles Wilkinson’s *Crossing the Next Meridian* contains a brief overview of Reclamation’s history and evolution that is generally good, and readers might find that a useful place to begin looking at Reclamation’s history.

Primary and original records related to Bureau of Reclamation history. Unlike the situation with most other Federal agencies, researchers in the history of Reclamation will find the Bureau of Reclamation’s historic records concentrated in one location — the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) branch on the Denver Federal Center in Lakewood, Colorado. Records held there include over 9,000 cubic feet of material which include correspondence, memoranda, project histories, construction notes, drawings, plans and maps, and photographs. More recent Reclamation records of interest to researchers are held in Reclamation offices in Washington, D.C. and Denver, regional offices, area offices, and field offices.

In addition, the records of the Secretary of the Interior and of other Federal agencies may be useful research sources. These records are located in NARA in College Park, Maryland, and in various Federal offices and NARA branches in the West.

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54

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